

# Federal Design Matters

Issue no. 15  
August 1978

An exchange of information and ideas related to federal design

National Endowment for the Arts



## Fourth Federal Design Assembly Pension Building, Washington, D.C. September 21 and 22 Theme: The Agency Team

"... The Fourth Federal Design Assembly will highlight examples of improved Federal design . . . I urge all Federal agency heads to participate . . ."

Letter from President Carter  
Text on page 2

**Preparation:** Using federal supplies to build a showcase for design exhibits (page 3). **Assembly program:** Measuring progress and setting goals (page 4).

Vindicated by history, shrouded in legend, sought for a new mission, the red-brick Pension Building is a fitting site for the Assembly (page 5).



To encourage positive response to the Assembly's emphasis on the need for harmonious working relationships among the administrators and designers, Assembly sponsors will

assign each Federal team its own table for the proceedings. This illustration depicts a typical agency team taking part in one of the scheduled informal discussion sessions.

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

June 8, 1978

Good design can help us meet our commitment to improve the efficiency of government and ease public access to Federal agencies and programs. Pleasant, productive work settings; lively, inviting buildings and grounds and attractive, readable publications are all important ways to carry out this commitment and reaffirm our concern for the human side of government.

Some Federal agencies have already begun to improve architectural, interior and graphic design in their offices and programs. I am particularly pleased that these agencies have often been able to undertake these efforts with little or no additional funds and within existing administrative structures.

Co-sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the General Services Administration, the Fourth Federal Design Assembly will highlight examples of improved Federal design and offer suggestions for ways to achieve it. I am certain that it will be a valuable step in a direction to which I remain firmly committed, and I urge all Federal agency heads to participate in its useful and rewarding work.

Text of a letter by President Carter that accompanied invitations to delegates to the Fourth Federal Design Assembly

## Assembly to focus on The Agency Team

The Fourth Federal Design Assembly, September 21 and 22, will emphasize teamwork, and the 800 delegates will know it the minute they take their seats beneath the towering Corinthian columns of the Pension Building's inner courtyard, scene of the assembly's major events.

The delegates will sit as teams, at tables designated for each of the agencies participating in the meeting. These teams, of 6 to 14 members each, will constitute the major segment of the audience for formal presentations about outstanding examples of design in government. Occupants of each table will also have time to participate in discussions and problem-solving exercises among themselves.

"The agency team, as envisaged under this program, is made up of all the people required for carrying out all types of design, including on the team approach to the design process," said Jerry Perlmutter, director of the assembly.

Perlmutter, Federal Graphics Coordinator at the Endowment, added:

"The agency team, as envisioned under this program, is made up of all the people required for carrying out all types of design, including interior and graphic design, architecture, landscape and environmental planning. It is made up of people with a diversity of skills, including many who are not designers *per se*. Actually, in many instances, participants in the process are not aware of how their work influences that of their colleagues or how they might work together more closely to make their own jobs easier and to make the total effect of agency effort greater than the sum of each person's individual contribution."

"It will be the primary purpose of the Fourth Federal Design Assembly to foster this synergistic effect. Each participant should leave with a better understanding of the federal design process and how to integrate it into federal decision making and policy."

Key parts of the program will be presented by federal agency teams—teams responsible for developing and carrying out successful design programs. Other features will include remarks by widely known architects; graphics, interior, and industrial designers; public affairs officials and administrators. The delegates and visitors will tour Pennsylvania Avenue on foot and by bus, visit exhibits, and take part in informal forums. (A complete description of the program is on page 3.)

Attendance by delegates is by invitation, but others interested in information about provisions for attending as visitors may phone (202) 857-0022 or 634-4286.



Looking west on Pennsylvania Avenue past proposed new plazas, this photograph shows Washington's Old Post Office, one of the landmarks on a walking tour of the Avenue that Assembly delegates will take.

## Program: Integrating design into federal policy

The Fourth Federal Design Assembly will start with charges to the 800 delegates by the editors of three of the nation's major design journals and end with an address by the federal government's chief advocate of arts activities, Joan Mondale.

In the 36 hours between these two events the delegates will review strides made in the quality of federal design and measure the distance agencies must yet travel to reach optimum excellence.

The charges will be delivered by William Marin of *Architectural Record*; Stanley Abercrombie of *Contract Interiors*, and Mildred Friedman of *Design Quarterly*. The assembly co-chairmen, Livingston Biddle, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, and Jay Solomon, administrator of the General Services Administration, will reply to the charges.

Attention will then turn to design of monumental scale. Gerald Patten, a planner for the National Park Service, and architect Leeland C. Allen, director of Design for the Pennsylvania Avenue Development Corporation, will direct a discussion of "The Grand Design for Pennsylvania Avenue." Allen will begin the session with a description of the organization and operation of the Corporation, a quasi-government body established to coordinate the complex public and private transactions required to revitalize the street that French landscape designer Pierre L'Enfant envisioned as the ceremonial axis between the Capitol and the White House.

The planners and designers working with PADC will outline the process for carrying out the master plan for the avenue, a scheme that is the culmination of some 16 years of studies, surveys, and public discussion. Others expected to take part in the presentation are landscape architect Hideo Sasaki, Sasaki Associates, Inc.; Jerome Lindsey, AIA, representing Jerome Lindsey Associates and M. Paul Friedberg and Partners; and John Rauch, AIA, representing George Patton, Inc., and Venturi and Rauch.



The renovated graphic design studio in the basement of the Federal Reserve Board building.

After the presentation, buses will take the delegates to Pennsylvania Avenue. They will divide into smaller groups for walking tours of parts of the street that will figure most prominently in the redesign. Docents of Architour, a non-profit firm that presents urban architectural tours, will guide each group to such landmarks as the old Post Office and the Willard Hotel.

The Pennsylvania Avenue session was planned under the leadership of Joan Shantz of the Arts Endowment, who is also planning coordinator for the whole assembly.

The delegates will return to the Pension Building where, after lunch, they will discuss a report of a Task Force on Design, Art and Architecture in Transportation. In announcing the adoption by his department of this unified design policy, Transportation Secretary Brock Adams hailed it as a policy "that coordinates improvements in transportation systems with increments in the quality of life" (FDM, November, 1977). DOT's Martin Convisser will lead the discussion.

Before the next presentation each agency will have time to discuss issues that interest its members. An assembly handbook, to be given to each delegate, is designed to facilitate these discussions. Conceived and developed by Mack Rowe of the Federal Reserve Board, it includes case studies of design problem-solving. (See page 4.)

The delegates will be called back into plenary session to hear a report on renovation of the Old Post Office by a team from the General Services Administration and representatives of the joint venture firms of Arthur Cotton Moore Associates; McCaughey, Marshall and McMillan; and Associated Space Design, Inc. GSA is supervising the renovation and Moore is the spokesman for the architect-engineer team selected in a 1977 competition to design changes for the Richardsonian Romanesque structure—Washington's best and last major representation of this late 19th century style. Plans for this segment of the program were developed by a committee led by the Arts Endowment's Lani Lattin Duke.

After dinner the delegates and their agency colleagues will be encouraged to return to the Pension Building to take part in

informal discussions or to view the exhibits. When the assembly reconvenes at 9:30 a.m. Friday, September 22, Nicholas Chaparos, the Endowment's coordinator of Federal Design Information and Education, will provide a brief overview of "New Directions for Government Interiors." After this overview, representatives of three federal agencies will discuss progress on three exemplary projects.

Louise Wiener, special assistant to the Secretary of Commerce for Cultural Resources and others from the Commerce Department, will discuss an interior-design process under way there that some designers regard as a potential pilot model for restoration and preservation of government buildings. Mack Rowe and his colleagues at the Federal Reserve Board will tell how they transformed cast-off basement space into a quality environment for offices and studios. David Dibner, assistant commissioner for construction management at GSA's Public Building Service will lead a meeting on stage of the GSA team that has been planning the renovation of a wing at GSA headquarters.

After another round of agency-team discussions and lunch, Pittsburgh graphics designer Grant Smith will narrate a slide presentation that will trace progress in visual communication in a number of government agencies which are using design as a management tool. He will be followed by Thomas F. Williams, Deputy Director of Public Awareness for the Environmental Protection Agency, and his colleagues who will describe that agency's efforts to improve communication with the public.

The visual communication segment, planned under the direction of Kay George, assistant coordinator of Federal Graphics for the Endowment, will end with a presentation by National Zoo Director Theodore Reed and his associates about the Zoo's design program.

To conclude the assembly, Mrs. Mondale will assess the gains made in the quality of design in government and show how these advances contribute to the total quality of life of American citizens.

All delegates are invited to a reception to be held immediately after adjournment.

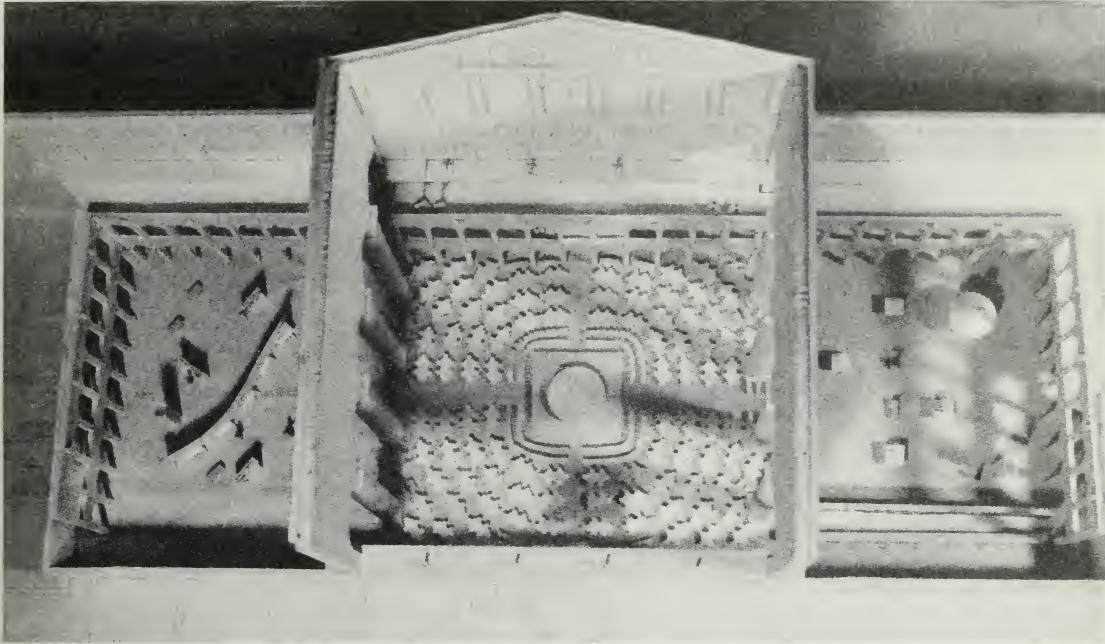
## Special Assembly Event

**Groundbreaking ceremony to mark renovation of Old Post Office**

**September 21, 1:00 p.m.**

**Front of Old Post Office immediately following delegates' tour of Pennsylvania Avenue**





Major areas to be used by delegates to the Assembly are shown in this cutaway model of the Pension Building.

## Exhibits to display work in all phases of design

Relying almost exclusively on materials and products that can be ordered from the government's comprehensive Federal Supply Schedule, a host of people with diverse skills is working to compete a dynamic setting for the Fourth Federal Design Assembly.

Occupying center stage in the 93-year-old Pension Building's interior court will be the stage itself. Grouped around it, arena style, will be tables for the delegates. Visitors will be seated in rows of chairs on the perimeter of the delegate area. Screens mounted on opposite sides of the court will provide unobstructed views of audio-visual presentations for all parts of the audience.

A scale model of the Pension Building built by Tom Bay helps facilitate decisions about seating arrangements, placement of exhibits, and other uses of space.

By mid-summer the number of exhibits completed or planned had grown to nine. Plans for still others were tentative. Among those for which plans are firm will be an exhibit that traces the legislative history of the 1976 Public Buildings Cooperative Use Act, legislation based on research and policy analysis by the National Arts Endowment's Task Force on Federal Architecture. The law authorizes the General Services Administration to make available in new and rehabilitated

federal buildings space for appropriate commercial concerns. It also provides for adaptation of existing buildings of local historic, architectural, or cultural significance for use by federal agencies. The exhibit will illustrate ways in which GSA applied the act in both old buildings and new construction.

Other exhibits will include a display of graphic designs of federal agencies that have adopted new standards for all their work; examples of New York designer Massimo Vignelli's formats for Senate documents; a display that reviews the state of the art for determining legibility and readability of type, and a 65-foot-long "fence" on which will be mounted documents produced by the Government Printing Office during a six-day period.

These exhibits, some built to travel for display elsewhere, were designed and mounted by Stephanie Comella under the direction of designer Nicholas Chaparov, the Endowment's coordinator of design information and education. An exhibit about Pennsylvania Avenue and a model of the planned renovation of the Old Post Office will also be featured in the assembly's exhibit area.

The Pension Building will remain open until midnight on the first day of the Assembly to give delegates and the public additional opportunities to view the exhibits and to permit delegates to use the building for informal discussions.

## Assembly handbook—a unique working tool

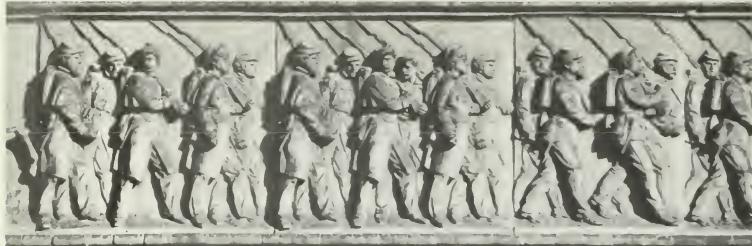
A handbook prepared especially for the Fourth Federal Design Assembly will be used as a workbook and discussion guide in some of the sessions and serve as a reference source after the assembly. Each delegate will receive a copy.

The handbook contains the eight case studies presented at the assembly which document successful design processes used by federal-agency designers or administrators.

Each study defines the problem and gives the solution, outlines obstacles the principal participants faced, and evaluates the results.

Another section presents typical problems encountered in government, along with possible solutions. Delegates will be encouraged to add their own problems and solutions and to send "unsolved" problems or questions to a Design Action Line, which the Arts Endowment will maintain as a follow-up to the assembly.

The assembly handbook was prepared under the direction of Mack Rowe, chief of graphic communications of the Federal Reserve Board. John Maxwell Hamilton was editor.



Commonly interpreted as depicting Union forces on the march, a 3-foot band of terra cotta relief extends 1200 feet around the building between the first and second floors.



This close-up shows details of the frieze, the work of sculptor Casper Buberl, who also molded the muses for the old Metropolitan Opera House in New York City.



This photograph looks upward to the roof of the Pension Building, showing not only its classic details—the capital of one of the 76-foot-high columns and an elegantly decorated arch—but the clerestory windows that so efficiently light and ventilate the building.

## The Assembly in Brief

**Co-chairmen:** Livingston L. Biddle, Jr., and Jay Solomon

**Dates:** September 21 and 22, 1978

**Place:** Pension Building, 4th and G Streets, N.W., Washington, D.C. (Judiciary Square Metro Station)

**Hours:** September 21, 8:30 a.m.-5:15 p.m. (The Pension Building will be open until midnight for delegates and others to view exhibits, hold discussions, meet special guests.)

September 22, 8:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m.  
(Reception follows adjournment.)

**Delegates:** Teams from 60 agencies. Teams are made up of the following job categories: Chief Administrative Officer, Building Manager, Space Manager, Graphic Design Supervisor, Chief Editor, Procurement Officer, Architect, Printing Officer, Landscape Architect, Public Affairs Chief, Interior Designers, and Professional Engineer

For further information, call 857-0022 or 634-4286

## Assembly site: a building with a past and a future

Once a way station to shelter upwardly mobile agencies while they waited for more modern quarters, the red-brick Pension Building in Washington's Judiciary Square has become a highly valued national asset.

Early this year a national committee of prominent citizens proposed that the 93-year-old building be made a National Museum of the Building Arts. The proposal calls for permanent and changing exhibitions, an extensive nationwide public education program, and research services.

"To advance the national goal of a suitable living environment for every American," said the committee, "the museum should be established by Congress."

In April, Maryland Senator Charles Mathias introduced a bill, co-sponsored by nine other senators, to carry out this recommendation.

Delegates to the Fourth Federal Design Assembly will be able to examine at close range features of the building that prompted the committee to choose it as the ideal site for a museum of building.

The massive building was completed in 1885 as a memorial to Civil War Veterans and as headquarters of the Pension Bureau, an agency that processed more than \$8 billion in payments to veterans of four wars and

## Planners for the Design Assembly

Planning for the Fourth Federal Design Assembly began in the Arts Endowment almost a year ago under the direction of Jerry Perlmuter and coordinated by Joan Shantz.

Committee members are Nicholas Chaparos, Birch Coffey, Lois Craig, Lani Latkin Duke, Mickey Friedman, Kay George, Roy Knight, Kay Lautman, Bill Marlin, Alan Marra, Gerald Patten, Bob Peck, Mack Rowe, Grant Smith, Peter Smith, Erma Striner, and Bert Woolf.

Among those assisting the planners are Tom Bay, Bill Bonnell, Joan Campbell, Elizabeth Darr, Susan Mullendore, and Amy Orlan.



their widows. Even before the building was completed, its colonnaded inner court was the scene of the inaugural ball for the first term of President Grover Cleveland. It was the first of nine inaugural balls held in the spacious court, the latest being a ball held for President Jimmy Carter and Vice-President Walter F. Mondale.

The building contains approximately 150,000 square feet of usable space in its three major floors and a fourth smaller one. Its two tiers of clerestory windows rise above the fourth level under a gable roof that peaks at 148 feet above street level.

Delegates to the Fourth Federal Design Assembly will be seated in that same court, described by the authors of the museum proposal as "a breathtaking space marked by eight 76-foot-high Corinthian columns, surrounded by four tiers of galleries, and pleasantly lighted by clerestory windows." The words are those of architectural and urban design critic Wolf Von Eckardt and researcher Cynthia R. Field, who call the building "a successful 19th century fusion of classical design and machine-age technology."

As they approach the structure in Washington's Judiciary Square, delegates will note the striking terra cotta frieze that extends 1,200 feet around the exterior of the building between the first and second floors (see top of page). The work of Bohemian-American sculptor Casper Buberl, the bas-relief depicts soldiers and sailors, presumably members of Union forces.

In the years immediately after its completion, the building was not universally admired. Its designer was U.S. Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs, who specified red bricks (2½ million were used) for its construction, making it fire resistant. This was an unusual technological achievement for that period, but it gave rise to some caustic comments from the building's detractors. Told of the building's fireproof construction, General Philip H. Sheridan is reported to have replied, "What a pity!"

Sheridan made the remark, according to legend, at Cleveland's inaugural ball, where Buffalo Bill Cody was the center of attention. The old Indian fighter's presence is linked to still another legend, one that has been traced to an experience of a Pension Building night-watchman some 30 years later. In

the light of his gas lamp, the guard stared in disbelief at an image that formed on one of the columns, then finished to resemble onyx. The outline of an Indian began to form in the veins of the fake stone. Further down the column he saw a buffalo head.

He dismissed the experience, convinced he had dreamed the whole thing. But the next day the strange profiles were still there. The morning papers reinforced his sense of awe. There on page one was a story about the death the night before of Buffalo Bill Cody.

These were not the only apparitions to appear in the columns. Another guard saw the outline of a skull. A 1920 newspaper article reports a visitation by profiles of George and Martha Washington. One night-watchman fled the building in panic, reporting that a horse almost rode him down.

Many were convinced at the turn of the century that the building was frequented by the ghost of "Corporal Tanner." The title was applied to a veteran of the Civil War who had lost both feet in combat and who, while serving as a shorthand clerk in the Bureau of Ordnance, was pressed into service to record accounts of President Lincoln's assassination. James Tanner, after having made many public appearances to recount his experiences during the Lincoln death watch, became a commissioner of the Pension Board. Tanner's visitation to the building,

## National Endowment for the Arts Washington, D.C. 20506

Official Business

legend holds, had little to do with affairs of the Pension Board. Robert Lincoln, as Secretary of War in the 1880s, had approved plans for the building. At about the same time a conspiracy theory about President Lincoln's assassination had gained wide currency. There were some who believed that the President's son had persuaded General Meigs to hide documents that would have shed light on the conspiracy theory in the voluminous hollow columns of the building, fearing that the "truth," coming on the heels of the bloody Civil War, would destroy the republic. Some think Tanner, who knew some of the details, was eternally drawn back to the building in search of evidence.

None of the Design Assembly delegates is likely to let any of these bizarre accounts keep them from taking a careful look at this remarkable example of federal design—a building that inspired Von Eckardt and Field to declare: "Although almost a hundred years old, it set an example for building in the future."

Acknowledgments:  
Coordinator, Design Information and Education:  
Nick Chapados  
Ass't Coordinator, Federal Graphics:  
Catherine F. George  
Editor/Writer: Simpson Lawson  
Research: Tom Bay  
Photos: Michael Bruce, Robert C. Lautman  
Illustration: Bill Bonnell, Angeline V. Culfoigenis

Postage and Fees Paid  
National Foundation on the Arts  
and the Humanities





their widows. Even before the building was completed, its colonnaded inner court was the scene of the inaugural ball for the first term of President Grover Cleveland. It was the first of nine inaugural balls held in the spacious court, the latest being a ball held for President Jimmy Carter and Vice-President Walter F. Mondale.

The building contains approximately 150,000 square feet of usable space in its three major floors and a fourth smaller one. Its two tiers of clerestory windows rise above the fourth level under a gable roof that peaks at 148 feet above street level.

Delegates to the Fourth Federal Design Assembly will be seated in that same court, described by the authors of the museum proposal as "a breathtaking space marked by eight 76-foot-high Corinthian columns, surrounded by four tiers of galleries, and pleasantly lighted by clerestory windows." The words are those of architectural and urban design critic Wolf Von Eckardt and researcher Cynthia R. Field, who call the building "a successful 19th century fusion of classical design and machine-age technology."

As they approach the structure in Washington's Judiciary Square, delegates will note the striking terra cotta frieze that extends 1,200 feet around the exterior of the building between the first and second floors (see top of page). The work of Bohemian-American sculptor Casper Buberl, the bas-relief depicts soldiers and sailors, presumably members of Union forces.

In the years immediately after its completion, the building was not universally admired. Its designer was U.S. Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs, who specified red bricks (2½ million were used) for its construction, making it fire resistant. This was an unusual technological achievement for that period, but it gave rise to some caustic comments from the building's detractors. Told of the building's fireproof construction, General Philip H. Sheridan is reported to have replied, "What a pity!"

Sheridan made the remark, according to legend, at Cleveland's inaugural ball, where Buffalo Bill Cody was the center of attention. The old Indian fighter's presence is linked to still another legend, one that has been traced to an experience of a Pension Building night-watchman some 30 years later. In

the light of his gas lamp, the guard stared in disbelief at an image that formed on one of the columns, then finished to resemble onyx. The outline of an Indian began to form in the veins of the fake stone. Further down the column he saw a buffalo head.

He dismissed the experience, convinced he had dreamed the whole thing. But the next day the strange profiles were still there. The morning papers reinforced his sense of awe. There on page one was a story about the death the night before of Buffalo Bill Cody.

These were not the only apparitions to appear in the columns. Another guard saw the outline of a skull. A 1920 newspaper article reports a visitation by profiles of George and Martha Washington. One night-watchman fled the building in panic, reporting that a horse almost rode him down.

Many were convinced at the turn of the century that the building was frequented by the ghost of "Corporal Tanner." The title was applied to a veteran of the Civil War who had lost both feet in combat and who, while serving as a shorthand clerk in the Bureau of Ordnance, was pressed into service to record accounts of President Lincoln's assassination. James Tanner, after having made many public appearances to recount his experiences during the Lincoln death watch, became a commissioner of the Pension Board. Tanner's visitation to the building,

## National Endowment for the Arts Washington, D.C. 20506

Official Business

legend holds, had little to do with affairs of the Pension Board. Robert Lincoln, as Secretary of War in the 1880s, had approved plans for the building. At about the same time a conspiracy theory about President Lincoln's assassination had gained wide currency. There were some who believed that the President's son had persuaded General Meigs to hide documents that would have shed light on the conspiracy theory in the voluminous hollow columns of the building, fearing that the "truth," coming on the heels of the bloody Civil War, would destroy the republic. Some think Tanner, who knew some of the details, was eternally drawn back to the building in search of evidence.

None of the Design Assembly delegates is likely to let any of these bizarre accounts keep them from taking a careful look at this remarkable example of federal design—a building that inspired Von Eckardt and Field to declare: "Although almost a hundred years old, it set an example for building in the future."

Acknowledgments:  
Coordinator, Design Information and Education:  
Nick Chaparov  
Ass't Coordinator, Federal Graphics:  
Catherine F. George  
Editor/Writer: Simpson Lawson  
Research: Tom Bay  
Photos: Michael Bruce, Robert C. Laufman  
Illustration: Bill Bonnell, Angeline V. Culfoigenis

Postage and Fees Paid  
National Foundation on the Arts  
and the Humanities

